



NEWS RELEASE

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United States Attorney's Office

Central District of California

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SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA MAN AGREES TO PLEAD GUILTY TO SMUGGLING PROTECTED TORTOISES INTO THE UNITED STATES

In a plea agreement filed today, a Diamond Bar man agreed to plead guilty to participating in a scheme that smuggled dozens of protected and endangered tortoises into the United States.

Wai Ho Gin, 31, who also uses the name "Bobby Gin," agreed to plead guilty to one count of conspiracy and one count of smuggling. Gin is expected to enter the guilty pleas before United States District Judge Edward Rafeedie on October 9.

A second defendant indicted earlier this year by a federal grand jury in Los Angeles – Umesh Kishore Tekani, who also uses the name "Mexx" – is a fugitive believed to be in Singapore. Tekani is accused of shipping the tortoises that were illegally imported into the United States. Tekani remains charged with conspiracy, six counts of smuggling, three counts of importing goods by means of false statements and five counts of money laundering.

In his plea agreement, Gin admitted working with Tekani to smuggle into the United States Radiated tortoises (*Geochelone radiata*), an endangered species threatened with extinction. Radiated tortoises are protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which is implemented in the United States as part of the Endangered Species Act. Gin also admitted illegally importing Indian Star tortoises (*Geochelone elegans* or *Testudo elegans*), a threatened species, the trading of which is strictly regulated by CITES. The

indictment alleges that Tekani obtained the tortoises in Asia, arranged to ship the animals via common courier to Gin in the United States, where Gin would distribute them to customers across the nation.

The conspiracy and smuggling counts each carry a maximum possible penalty of five years in federal prison. Gin's plea agreement contemplates a prison sentence of 10 months to 16 months, although it is important to note that this calculation is not binding on Judge Rafeedie.

Previously, as part of this investigation, four individuals were charged, pleaded guilty and sentenced to probation for receiving smuggled tortoises from Tekani.

The investigation into the tortoise-smuggling ring was conducted by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, which is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

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